

FEMALE INDIVIDUALITY AND STRUGGLE IN A PATRICENTRIC SOCIETY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ANITA DESAI'S *WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?*

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Abstract

Indian society has progressed rapidly in its many echelons. Nonetheless, women belonging to these echelons continue to lag behind. They are unable to come out of the conventional roles because of the orthodoxy of the patricentric society. Women are confined within the four walls of the house where they hardly get to share their inner feelings, emotions and pain. Although they get material comfort, pleasure and relaxation, their voice goes unheard in many cases. In patriarchal society, women are subjugated and not given their due rights in many spheres of life. Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* talks of women's liberty and gives a conscious voice to their identities as genuine human beings of post-independence Indian society. Thus, this study sheds light on various inner problems like isolation, subjugation, marital discord and psychological distress encountered by women in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* This paper also critically analyses female individuality and struggle in a patricentric society applying the various perspectives of feminist theory.

Keywords: feminism, patricentric society, female individuality, subjugation, psychological distress/conflict, marital discord.

Introduction

Feminism stands for cultural, political and economic movements which champions legitimate protection for women and in creating an egalitarian society. It is considered as a global movement, which started in the west around the 1960s to liberate, attain the rights and dignity of women (Barry,1995). Its main goal was to ensure women get their recognition in society and to bring about change so that women can overcome their powerlessness and helplessness. Despite variations of feminist criticism, there is a common thread which all feminist criticism shares, that is the concept of patriarchy. Feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Kate Millet and many others emphasise that the whole cultural gamut is controlled by patriarchal values. In patricentric society, women are subjugated in terms of their individual identity; and they are always considered culturally only with the men in their lives. Since time immemorial, women have often been depicted as docile, fragile and their biological features are associated with their destiny. In the black community, women are the victims of discrimination on the ground of colour and class (Wall,1995). There is the play of patriarchy in the arena of philosophical and political systems. In patriarchal ideology, the male is the superior and the female is the inferior. The female person cannot achieve their independent identity under patriarchy. Simon de Beauvoir points out in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir,1974). Helene Cixous believes that women will not learn to resist patriarchal thinking by becoming part of the patriarchal power structure, that is, by obtaining equal status and equal opportunity

in current patriarchal society (in Tyson, 2006). The egregious condition of women across the world precipitated women activists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Christiane Rochefort, Christine Delphy, Anne Tristan and so on to stand up against the male-dominated framework of society, thus the outcome was the advent of the feminist movement.

Women in the west are quite advanced in terms of education and economy than in the east. They are well aware of their vulnerable condition in the parochial domestic world and discrimination in employment and the educational field as well. Majority of western women consider the emotions and feelings as weaknesses that create dependence, fear and helplessness. Feminine values like sharing, caring, loving and nurturing dwindle and is considered as tools that subordinate them to male-suppression. Most western women tend to love self-assertion, and the self-assertion inspires them to search for individual respect even in married life. Thus, women claim their right and proper place in society. Nancy F. Cott comments on the origin of the women's movement "Such consciousness ofinferiority was the first group - consciousness likely to produce a feminist movement, because it acknowledges cultural and social determinants of women's capabilities as well as divine and natural ones, and thus allowed for the possibility of change" (Cott, 1987:202). The revolutionary origin of the movement has resulted in the development of historical feminist personalities. Historical feminist figures have showed their strong appeal for woman's liberation from the biased male domination. In the 18th century, Mary Wollstonecraft puts in effort to free women from the clutch of male domination in the patricentric society. Wollstonecraft insinuates the drawback in the process of socialisation. She abhors the then corrupt education system which led women to love at the cost of reason, and hindered women to read business, mathematics and medicine. In her *A Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792) Wollstonecraft comments,

"Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice" (Wollstonecraft, 1997:398).

The reformed education system imparts a new dimension and understanding of the dignity of women as human beings. Education enlivens the covert stimulating capacity and inventiveness inside the women to be open-minded to grab the new opportunity. Das examines the significance of education: "Education plays a significant role in removing hackneyed perceptions and is a means of change" (Das, 2003:176).

Virginia Woolf, one of the renowned feminist writers in the 20th century, contributed significantly in understanding the patriarchal structure or system. In her well-known work *A Room of One's Own* (1935), Woolf states that the economic and social hindrances muzzle the creativity of women. She illustrates that within the domestic periphery women can never produce literary works. Virginia Woolf points out that the women writers were unable to write freely in the past because of patriarchal values and norms. She incorporates the drastic change in terms of family and social life of women in her writings.

In this regard, the 'Me Too' movement can be applied. 'Me Too' movement came into being primarily in the 1970s which generated a new kind of consciousness, especially for social change because of the impossibility of the refusal of anything. The era stirred women to mobilise for the drastic dethronement of the male-centric society by incorporating the need to question and challenge culture and the traditional notions of women. In this era all kind of human life sought for self-identity. Yolande Cohen explains the circumstance: "It aimed first to realise the total self-actualisation of the individual in the here and now" (Cohen, 1989: 355). The era of unbelievable spirit and excitement swayed the women's movement across the world.

In every culture and society, women are subordinate to men. This dismal condition has suppressed the actual potentiality of women. Feminist critics consider this quandary as the by-product of a gender-based society and demand for women's equal position, equal treatment and equal opportunity. The 20th century has been a period of dynamic revitalisation in terms of women's economic, political, and social rights. Susheela Kaushik stated "Politics is present in all spheres of our social life, including areas like the domestic world of family and personal relationships, which it is generally assumed falls outside its domain" (Kaushik, 1997: 2). Feminists believe strongly that masculine or feminine characteristics are solely a social set up that could be wiped out in favour of gender equity. Helen E. Longino states in this regard, "The constructivist conception of gender contrasts sharply with that, still characteristics of our culture, which specifies that there are two basic types of human being; male and female, and that certain traits, behaviour and occupations are appropriate for each type: masculine and feminine are natural kinds" (Longino, 1986: 24).

As far as women are concerned, Feminism has been an endeavour for appraising the actual social, economic and political condition of women. Feminism challenges the pervasive patriarchal ideology, its values, its culture and its inefficiency. In a nutshell, it engages in efforts to uplift women's status in society by rejecting male superiority and also attempts to eliminate misinterpretation of women-ness formed by the patriarchal culture and society (Tyson, 2006).

Feminism in Indian Writing in English: Anita Desai and her Female Consciousness

With the upsurge of feminism globally, a new generation of Indian feminists have come into being. Women have become strong, independent and advanced in terms of their circumstances and in different fields. Contemporary Indian feminists such as Kamala Marakandya, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Bharati Mukharjee, Anita Desai, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Dina Mehta, Namita Gokhale and many others fought against domestic violence, gender stereotypes, discrimination, objectification, male chauvinism and sexism. The great philanthropist Swami Vivekananda aptly said, "All nations have attained, greatness by paying proper respects to the women. That country and that nation which do not respect the women have never become great, nor will ever be in future....." (Vivekananda, 2019). The participation of all women is the need of the hour to attain the goal of women's empowerment. In India 48% of the population are women, and thus women's role is important in almost every field (Govt. Census Data report, 2011). Moreover, Gandhian ideology stimulated Indian women to follow their own intellect and conscience. Gandhi emphasized that women should be self-assertive. In India, British women missionaries taught Indian women to be individuals. Kanti says, "Under the western impact, Indian women experienced an air of freedom and the stir of the new era [...]. It brought to women a total new concept of themselves as persons individually important and nationally needed" (Kanti, 2003: 61).

However, in post-independence India women accepted the feminine responsibilities imposed by the Indian patricentric society contrary to the Gandhian rhetoric and the value of individuality inculcated by western norms and education. One cannot deny the fact that Indian women identify themselves as individuals with their own emotions and ideas. Jasbir Jain comments on Indian woman: "She is simultaneously able to achieve two things-one, recognizes the value of feminine virtues for society and human survival and second in the process also free them from the category of gender identity" (Jain, 2002: 121). The post-independence Indian women long for the kind of knowledge which gives them autonomy and generates a consciousness of their selves as genuine human beings. In the 1970's India, feminist literary critics started fostering the belief that women had to formulate their own literature in which the feminine sensibility, experience and issues are brought to the fore.

In literature, feminism deals with the portrayal of women in society. It holds a concept of independence of mind, spirit and body. It is conspicuous in many English novels in India. It can be said categorically that Anita Desai's fiction is very distinct from the fiction of other Indian women writers such as Ruth Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sehgal. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's novels *Heat and Dust* (1975), *The Nature of Passion and Three Continents* focused on the social aspects; Sehgal's novels *A Time to be Happy*(1958), *Storm in Chandigarh* and *Rich Like Us* was on political and social awareness; and Kamala Markandaya's novels *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury* and *A Silence of desire* was on the rural scenario, woman's positions and inner turmoil in Indian society. It is widely known to all that Anita Desai is one of the most influential contemporary Indian novelists. Anita Desai fleshes out the new concept to Indian English fiction and she has delineated a perfect image of a modern "New woman" in her novels as well. Commenting on Anita Desai's women, S.P. Swain states: "Anita Desai portrays women as not totally cut off from familial and social ties but are those who remain within these orbits and protest against monotony, injustice and humiliation. Woman in her novels is not a mere goddess or a robot but a self-actualizing and self-realizing individual" (Swain, 1995: 105). Anita Desai is distinguished for her brilliant illustration of the internal life of her female characters. Her novels examine the tension, crisis, frustration and alienation of middle-class women. She underscores the predicament of a modern woman in society and her eventual annihilation at the altar of marriage. Anita Desai is an architect of feminine sensibility. Generally, her novels record the growth of a writer's obsession with the undivulged internal world of her female characters and various themes of enduring interest as well.

The term "Indo-Anglian" insinuates original literary creation in the English language by Indians. Today there are a great number of educated Indians who use the English Language as a medium of their creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. Their writings have now developed into substantial literature in its own right and it is this substantial body of literature which is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. As C. R. Reddy in his foreword to Srinivasa Iyengar's work *Indo-Anglian Literature* points out, "Indo-Anglian literature is not

essentially different in kind from Indian literature. It is part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commenting from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history ever increasing up to the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghosh, and bids fair to expand with our, as well as humanity's expanding future" (Iyengar, 1962: 9). C.V. George comments on her works and states "Anita Desai is a dominant figure in the twentieth century Indo-Anglian fiction. She deserves accolades for her remarkable literary output. Persisting in unravelling the mystery of the inner life of her characters, she shows her perpetual interest in their psychic life. Solitude and self-exploration are the recurring themes of her novels" (George, 2000: 159). Anita Desai demonstrates such women who protest against the unsafe conditions silently as though they are scared of breaking up the social order. A very subtle understanding of human psyche sparks Anita Desai's investigation of the nature of the voices of women's liberation. Her concerns with the female consciousness give way to the issues of greater human interest envisioning the author's development to maturity.

Generally, female protagonists of Anita Desai are elite urban Indians. Economic autonomy is not a vital matter for her protagonists. All her characters pose questions to the rules of patriarchy directly or indirectly. They turn down accepting the rules imposed upon them by traditional social conventions. Marriage or the joint family are farcical and coercive matters to them. Anita Desai's female protagonists are devoid of the ability to get acclimatised to the different kind of circumstances. Subsequently, many female characters encounter a vicious abnormal end. As a writer, Anita Desai's intention is to consider her female characters as humans with their flaws and potentialities who are captured in the trap of their obligations. Desai's feminism is not adjudged as anti-male because her women characters crave for man's love, affection and thrill of life which is refused to them. Anita Desai recognises the quandary of the fair-sex and imagines the life of a female as a string of commitments and responsibilities. Hence, feminism, for Desai, is heterogeneous and transcends the universal sisterhood of women. Aside from the existentialist reality of life, she sets forth the sensibility and sentiments of women for their role, status and respect in society. Anita Desai notices their emotional world minutely and vociferates against the silent agony and vulnerability of millions of women, especially married women (Padhy, 2016: 47- 49).

Anita Desai zeros in on how her heroines fight against the forces of an absurd life dauntlessly in the contemporary urban milieu. Her female characters do not try to cope with the social ethics and human bondage. Desai has brought into focus the various facets of feminine consciousness, which incorporates the isolation that drives women to the brink of neurosis. A. Hariprasanna, in his critical analysis of Desai's novel, aptly points out:

"Her novel is concerned with the emotional world of women, revealing a rare, imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility" (Hariprasanna, 1994-95: 81).

This article examines the struggle for individuality and self-identity of one such female character created by Anita Desai, where she reveals the emotional world of Sita in the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

Sita's Troubled Psyche, Isolation, Identity Crisis and Psychological Distress

Where Shall We Go This Summer? a famous novel by Anita Desai is a story of a troubled and anxious mind. This particular novel brings to light fragmentation between family members, isolation, loneliness and the troubled mindset of a middle-class woman - Sita, who is the central character of the story. She feels suffocated within the four walls of her home; and her marriage is visible as and when she takes refuge at the ideal magic island. When she finds herself pregnant for the fifth time, the exasperation and grittiness of life becomes unbearable for her. Gradually Sita understands the truth of life and comes to terms with her vulnerable situation. The story ends with Sita pushing aside the feeling of intense pain bidding goodbye to the duplicity and monotony of her daily existence. The novelist outlines the monotonous moments of Sita: "She sat there smoking, not even looking at the sea any more, till she exclaimed, 'Bored? How? Why? With what?' And could not begin to comprehend her boredom. She herself looking on it, saw it stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep, that in fright she scrambled about it, searching for a few of these moments that proclaimed her still alive, not quite drowned and dead" (Desai, 1982: 45).

Anita Desai's characters go through cries of consciousness. They are lovely, isolated and misfit in real life. They try to find meaning in life to assert their existence. Desai portrays the anxiety of the characters who are searching for meaning and identity in their life. Her characters do not pursue truth of life but a meaning of existence in a patricentric

society. The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* demonstrates the severe identity crisis of protagonist Sita, an insightful woman who finds herself isolated from her children and husband.

Protagonist Sita is very sensitive and incapable of looking at things as usual. In the first part of the novel entitled "Monsoon 67", Sita is portrayed as the wife of affluent businessman Raman:

"She had had four children with pride and pleasure - sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure - with all the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy and parturition" (Desai, 1982: 29).

Sita is not gleeful in the present circumstance as she is pregnant with a fifth child. She takes shelter in the Island to get rid of her boredom and isolation:

"She saw that Island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic. Then there would be the sea, it would wash the frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps, the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings" (Desai, 1982: 91).

She feels that modern life is brimmed with violence and commotion; her husband Raman does not care about her feelings at this juncture. Her children are engaged in many activities which further alienate Sita. This sense of alienation or isolation is due to other emotional imbalances. There are some incidents like the fighting between her cook and *ayah* (Maid) - *ayah's* quarrelling on the streets, breaking of buds by Menaka, slitting the paintings to strips and dropping them on the floor by Menaka irritate her. All these incidents upset and fluster Sita. The sad part of her life is due to her inability to accept the attitude and values of her patricentric society. Sita feels dreariness in every person which is the utmost threat to her existence, hence the protagonist tries to visualize the world of her dreams in a patricentric society. Her hopelessness aggravates and thus, makes her impervious, cruel and outlandish to her husband and children. It leads to a psychological conflict in her mind. Her irritation pushes her to protect her sanity and sense by getting away from her routine life in a Bombay apartment to rush to Manori, an island on the west coast. Sita goes berserk and flies to the Island:

". . . in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth. Wasn't this Manori, the island of miracles? Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind. His legend was still here in this house - in the green tinge of the night shadows, the sudden slam of a wooden shutter, the crepitation of rain on the roof - and he might work another miracle, posthumously. She had come on a pilgrimage, to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn" (Desai, 1982: 28).

She is relocated to Manori Island to keep her fifth child protected from the clamour and bustle of metropolitan city life. Sita exposes her intention to her husband Raman: "I mean I want to keep it - I don't want it to be born." (Desai, 1982:32). Although Sita has certain cravings in her heart which she misses totally, she does not want to give birth to her child in such a grisly atmosphere. At this juncture, Sita perceives that she is not loved; and thus, goes through weird restlessness and seclusion in her existence.

In this novel, Sita's outlook to married life is unhinged by the knowledge and experiences of her parents. The reason of her despondency is deep-rooted in her dejected and forlorn childhood. Sita's mother flees to Benares after leaving her husband and children behind and provides no information further about herself. The fact is that Sita longs for her mother's affection. Her father was unable to take care of his children and moreover, his promiscuous attraction towards his elder step-daughter Rekha unnerves Sita.

The questioning method of the title of the novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* has its profound connotation of an escape from summer which manifests through inner tension, depression, dissatisfaction, mental dissonance and turmoil of the inward world of Sita. Anita Desai showcases the cruelty of the modern world through the eyes of a woman in the four walls of her familial relationship. The novelist closes the novel with Sita's convalescence from her plummet into existential insipidity. As a "broken bird" of the shoreline, Sita examines the root of her disquiet and erratic behaviour and gradually comes to realise the art of existence in her predestined life. B. Chitra talks about the novels of Anita Desai after examining this novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* And she comments:

“The novels of Anita Desai catch the bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-gratification and self-fulfilment” (Chitra, 2010: 216).

Sita lets go of her ego, and this makes her aware of human relationships. Undoubtedly, Sita is brave enough to stand against her situation. She takes the indictment upon her shoulders for being mawkish rather than facing reality.

Sita's Subjugation, Defiance against Patricentric Social Structure and Marital Discord

Sita develops rude behaviour to protest against her family, where patriarchy is deep-seated. This is solely a defiance attitude against the male chauvinistic society. Sita's voice represents the voice of women against male chauvinism or patriarchy, which is a sort of political consciousness of the inferiority of women as compared to men in the culture. Sita's defiant attitude is reflected by her planning to leave her house in despair when her husband Raman asks her an inoffensive question “Where Shall We Go This Summer?” Sita replies that she wants to run away from the chaos of the metropolitan city life to her childhood Island Manori where she reckons that she would find the same magic as she had felt in her youth. Sita states, “What I am doing is trying to escape from the madness here (the house where she lives), escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again” (Desai, 1982: 32) and “I will go. I am leaving tomorrow. On the Island – it will be different” (Desai, 1982: 33). Sita comes back to the Manori island as she is afraid of confronting reality. She hangs between her self-fulfilment and married life. The unanticipated arrival of Sita makes the island-dwellers pleased. The island washerwomen and fisherwomen welcome her wholeheartedly. Sita puts in an effort not to be emotional and keeps herself away from daily household chores. She considers delusion as a defensive umbrella and a substitute impetus to conceal her inability to adapt to the prevailing rules and norms of society to which she belongs.

As a representative of the Indian community, Sita revolts against the insensitive attitude of males. She expresses her backlash at Raman, “What do you know about my condition’ she flared. ‘I’ve told you - I’ve tried to tell you but you haven’t understood a thing’, and hurled slippers, papers, nightgowns” (Desai, 1982:30). She vents out her inner rage at the selfishness of Raman by flinging the things. Similarly, Sita's rebellious attitude against the sexual oppression of the patricentric society gets reflected by her callousness to her physical appearance to attract her husband Raman. Raman comments, “Why can't you just be neat and tidy? he had asked despairingly in the beginning, but then learnt that these were the two qualities she had never known” (Desai, 1982:120). This remark by Raman comes as an expectation from his wife Sita to maintain good-looking appearance.

The incident of the fight between eagle and crows implicates the female individuality of Sita in the novel. She finds some crows are attacking an eagle from the courtyard of her flat. The eagle is trying utmost to protect himself from the attack of crows. Thereafter, she thinks to shield the victim eagle from the constant attack of crows. Sita urges her sons to fetch the toy gun for killing the crows instantly, but unfortunately, her son Karan falls down and get injured. Thereafter, Sita herself brings the toy gun and finally shoots the crows. It insinuates Sita's yearning for protecting an eagle but her son find that it is dead. They also observed the very next morning the eagle was gobbled up by the crows. While sipping tea, her husband Raman comments to her, “They've made a good job of your eagle” (Desai, 1982: 37). She answers him “perhaps it flew away” (Desai, 1982: 37). In this regard, Dr. M. Maini Meitei states: “Sita's words ‘perhaps it flew away?’ against her husband's caustic remark that her eagle has been eaten by the crows, suggests the future course of her action following her defeat and loss of identity” (Meitei, 2000: 35-36). However, Sita is assured that it might not have flown away. The novelist seeks to demonstrate Sita's female individuality by this incident. It also implicates Sita's fight with her husband Raman for gaining superiority at a deeper psychological level. Raman is the emblem of crows that attack the helpless, and the naive eagle represents Sita. Sita's endeavours to safeguard an eagle from the fierce attack of the crows is her struggle and resistance against the male principles embodied by her husband Raman. In this context Kate Millet's viewpoint can be applied to demystify the things in a better way that patricentric society is the prime reason for women's subjugation and subordination which is expressed in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970). She opines that women need to ameliorate their personalities, economic status and literary career. Millet contributed to the feminist view that the personal world is connected with the outside world. Oppression of women at the deeper level can be figured out by investigating the personal level at home. Millet states that by showcasing the collective concerns related to men's power and domination, the structure can be reframed that

consequently sways women's life in terms of personal law. She opines that patriarchal ideology eggs on women for their conventional roles as daughter, wife and mother. Millet opines in *Sexual Politics* (1970) that

"social caste supersedes all the forms of inegalitarianism: racial, political or economic, and unless the clinging to male supremacy as a birth right is finally forgone, all systems of oppression will continue simply by the virtue of their logical and emotional mandate in primary human condition" (Millet, 1970: 96).

Aside from Sita, another woman character Jamila and her small sphere inside the tea-shop indicates the acceptance of the stringent rules of the society for women. Her sphere ".....where only known and trusted customers such as Moses were permitted and welcomed" (Desai, 1982: 8) is a protected area for her, and she accepts it easily. The people who live in the tea-shop are not welcomed by Jamila until her husband allows them. In this manner, Jamila obeys the cultural ethos of the Indian society. But this implies a kind of restriction on women in Indian society.

Sita's craving for leaving Bombay and going to Manori island is exacerbated after the crows-eagle incident. Subsequently, she packs hastily and leaves for Manori Island for getting relief from her husband's unsympathetic, harsh and hypocritical world. It is Sita's final attempt to shield her own identity by showcasing trust to the strange world of her father. Anita Desai encapsulates the universal desire of womanhood for attaining individual identity and a complete life as desired by the protagonist Sita. Likewise, Virginia Woolf turns down the conventional notion about women that they are docile and feeble; and longs for an essential place for women in society and literature since they are as independent as men in her work *A Room of One's Own* (1935).

Sita considers herself a captive in a house which gives her nothing but tedious and hopeless disgruntlement. Since she lives with her insensitive husband, Sita finds her surroundings to be harsh and spiteful. Sita admonishes her children for petty things, and she shouts at the servants while they are busy in the kitchen, which shows her hypersensitive attitude. Thereby, Sita plans stupidly not to give birth to her fifth child in a world of fierceness and abhorrence which is similar to a place where "the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle on a neighbouring rooftop....." (Desai, 1982:30). She snivels and comments, "I do not want to have the baby" (Desai, 1982:30). Sita further states that she is not interested to have her baby in this bleak and hollow world. The concept of modern feminism by twentieth-century feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir can be applied in this context which is highlighted in *The Second Sex* (1974). She has foregrounded a pervasive consciousness and socio-historical structure of women. De Beauvoir asserts that socialisation leads women to be flesh and sexy for the sheer enjoyment of men. She points out that men defines women in society. The male writers construct myths which impede the freedom of women. De Beauvoir reckons that language articulates more of the male than human kind. Therefore, it is quintessential to defy the point of theory for feminists to deconstruct the patriarchal framework rather than getting into the theoretical sphere on men's terms. De Beauvoir forms an outlook for women to be determinate, confident and self-assertive for liberating them from the social structure of femininity.

Sita's depression impels her to go to the Manori island, a corruption-free world that is devoid of sex and appetite, where she hopes to give birth to her fifth child. Sita has to go away from the tumult of the urban atmosphere in Bombay to Manori island to preserve her sanity. She gradually realises that her struggle to keep off her husband, family and children is nothing but a sheer delusion. Her bygone days in Bombay linger around her. Sita's mind goes back to the glittering room of Bombay when she is in the Island house. Besides this, she often recalls many daily chores of Bombay life.

"Here!" she cried in a panic for her whole body ached with a shrill insistence and the thought flickered through her of the flat in Bombay, white with electric light, the twinkle of China, the meal served by servants in white, the routine to which the children were used, and their beds, smooth, cool. 'Bring the luggage in', she ordered. 'Get the beds made. And food- haven't you got any food made?" (Desai, 1982: 26).

The moment's isolation reminds her that life can never be meaningful in the absence of family. Sita perceives later that man and woman are two wheels of one system in the patricentric society. She also believes that a man cannot live without a woman. Sita's endeavours to be far away from the troubled and heart-breaking reality of the world goes in vain. Sita decides to go back to her house when her husband Raman convinces her to do so. In fact, her unexpected and sudden capitulation creates anti-climax circumstance in the novel. Sita packs all her clothes briskly for the journey

to Bombay again. She attempts to cope with her hard and bitter circumstances in actual life and also perceives that the island Manori is a fallacious symbol to keep her away from the reality. Generally, this island reflects spiritual peace and sign of individualism. Through the realisation of Sita, Anita Desai showcases the harsh truth, which is the philosophy of acceptance of life.

Sita had spent many significant years of her life on Manori Island. Unlike the mythological Raman, modern Raman does not value his wife. The marital discord of the modern Raman and Sita is demonstrated sardonically with the romanticised relationship which lasted between Raman and Sita despite having the resemblance in terms of names and situations. Marriage does not seem to work out the problems of both Raman and Sita. They lead their life without harmony and congeniality. Their marriage bond is considered to be a union of incongruity.

Conclusion

In the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai brings to the fore the various facets of feminist revelation of women's oppression through her portrayal of the isolation of a mother, a wife and a woman which is created by family and society. Anita Desai exhibits a middle-aged, nervous and sensitive woman's isolation and subjugation from husband and son due to the emotional responses to multiple things surrounding her. Sita is the symbol of a modern housewife whose sensibility and emotions are threatened continuously in the patricentric society. Her mental anguish is a consequence of her inability to get acclimatised to modern society. The conclusion underpins the emphasis of the novel beyond the tenacity of Sita's neurotic identity crisis. It underscores the transcendental reality of feminism. Anita Desai accentuates on this inner world of a woman and investigates the miserable position of a highly sensitive and emotional woman exploited by carelessness and isolation in the patricentric society. It is also manifested that Desai is adept in delineating the inner pain of women and their growing restlessness for liberation and empowerment.

Desai's woman character in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* attain her liberty within the male-dominated patriarchal society. The hardship of woman is due to her birth in a patricentric society that fails to appreciate woman as an individual. But in the post-independence Indian society, women have consciousness of their own. In this novel, Desai's woman has consciousness of her body. Sita's anger and unwillingness at the fifth pregnancy manifests as her internal wish to control her body. At the end, she had to establish her identity and individuality from the patricentric society, where Sita manages to claim her self-esteem within her socio-familial sphere. She had no other choice but to acquire her identity from the male dominated society.

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Endnote

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